1: Melamid K-4 (no date) 1953 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4 Qatar MK3

tively recent, since none of the earlier observers comment much on them. Wood and sailcloth for boats have to be imported from a distance, a situation that may have seriously hampered these occupations in the past. In view of the absence of a hinterland and the poverty of the shore, there seems to have been little opportunity for trade. Recently the export (probably smuggled) to Iran of imported sugar and textiles is reported to have grown, but no statistics are available.

Armed interference with the ships plying the ancient trade routes from India and East Africa to Basra and the West through the Strait of Hormuz and the narrow funnel of the Persian Gulf was the major source of income for the inhabitants. The area became known as the "Pirate Coast," a name still found on many maps. Attacks on British ships took place as late as 1905, and the attack on a large Arab dhow in 1944 has been reported.[4] Prevention of piracy would have required the constant presence of relatively large fleets to block the many inlets into which the pirates could withdraw their small ships. An alternative would have been the occupation of the whole coast—a costly procedure, and hardly worth while economically. Therefore trading powers in the Persian Gulf, such as the Portuguese in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the Moslem empires before and after, limited their repression of piracy to occasional raids ashore in which one or two main pirate strongholds would be captured and held for a short time. Obviously, such measures were neither effective nor permanent.

From the end of the eighteenth century on, British trade in the Persian Gulf became increasingly important, and after many vicissitudes a British fleet was dispatched in 1819–1820 to punish and eliminate the pirates. After the usual bombardments the sheikhs of the coast were made to sign a solemn agreement not to fight one another; this was supposed to remove the main cause of piracy. Further, they promised to refrain themselves from piracy and to suppress it among their subjects. However, as soon as the British fleet withdrew, the agreement was broken. After another show of British arms, another treaty was signed by the sheikhs in 1835. Unlike the earlier agreement, the covenant of 1835 did not provide for universal peace, but only for a maritime truce: the sheikhs agreed not to fight one another on the sea, or to engage themselves, or permit their subjects to engage, in piracy—war on land was still permitted. In return, the British government agreed not to interfere in the internal affairs of the sheikhdoms, including their many land wars. Perhaps because of this unique outlet for the energies of the sheikhs

[4] For example, by O'Shea, *op. cit.*, p. 116

1: Melamid K-4 (no date) 1953 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4
Qatar MK3

and their subjects, assisted by the occasional vigilance of British cruisers and sloops, piracy ceased, and since the 1850's the coast (except for Qatar) has been known as the "Trucial Coast," and the sheikhdoms collectively as "Trucial 'Oman," though there exists no political connection between the sheikhdoms of the coast and the sultanate of Muscat and 'Oman to the east.

Slave trading in natives of the coast, other Arabs, and Africans, and also gunrunning, long a subsidiary occupation, became predominant after the establishment of the maritime truce. Before the end of the nineteenth century Great Britain was forced to make another series of treaties with the sheikhs outlawing these practices.[5] In return for small subsidies, the sheikhs were prohibited from granting concessions for mining operations or bunkering stations to nationals of other states except with the approval of the British government. Further, British officials stationed in the area of the Persian Gulf obtained the right to supervise any foreign nationals entering or residing in the area of the sheikhs. These clauses were supposed to guarantee Great Britain against the threatened acquisition of bases by France, Russia, and Germany, which would have disturbed British naval dominance in the Indian Ocean. By means of these treaties the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf became virtual British protectorates in all matters of international concern, but without British military occupation or civilian administration. The British Indian rupee gradually became the currency in use along the coast; in the interior the Maria Theresa dollar is more acceptable.

In accordance with the policy of nonintervention in internal affairs, Great Britain recognizes no boundaries between the sheikhdoms. Trucial sheikhs are therefore able to attack and absorb one another's territory without restriction, and, similarly, new Trucial sheikhdoms can emerge if they agree to the provisions of the treaties. For example, the 1820 agreement was signed by eight local sheikhs (exclusive of the sheikh of Bahrein, signing for Qatar), but only six were left to sign the 1835 treaty. In 1914, only five sheikhdoms were reported to exist,[6] and today the number seems to be seven Trucial sheikhdoms and one sheikhdom, Fujaira, outside the Trucial treaties (Table I). The fate of the vanished sheikhdoms is unknown. As Sir Percy Cox[7]

[5] It should be noted that these treaties refer only to the external relations of the region. Therefore slavery of natives is exclusively subject to local law and custom and is independent of the treaty relation with Great Britain. Several recent reports mention the existence of slavery in the region but without citing definite cases. Nothing is known of the extent of the slavery, its conditions, or its economic importance.

[6] For example, in Peace Handbooks, Vol. 13, Foreign Office, Historical Section, London, 1920, p. 43.

[7] Some Excursions in Oman, *Geogr. Journ.*, Vol. 66, 1925, pp. 193–227; reference on p. 200.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

Brideaux, in the last century. Formerly this part of the coast was known in English official literature as 'The Pirate Coast', on account of the prevalence of piracy in these waters, although the Arabs call it *Sahil 'Oman* (Oman Coast) or *Shamal*, after the hot north wind which blows across the Gulf.

In 1853, a Treaty or 'Truce' was signed between the British Government and the five principalities—Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Umm-al-Quwain and Sharjah. This 'perpetual truce' provided for the entire cessation of liabilities at sea amongst the signatories and imposed on the British Government the duty of enforcing peace, and obtaining reparation for maritime aggression committed in contravention of the agreement. The sheikhs are, therefore, styled 'Trucial Sheikhs'.

A second treaty was signed in 1892, by which the sheikhs bound themselves not to enter into any agreement or correspondence with any power other than the British Government; not to permit without the sanction of the British Government the residence within their territory of the agent of any other government, and not to sell, cede, mortgage or otherwise give for occupation, any part of their territories, save to the British Government.

By these two treaties preferential, and almost exclusive relations were created between the British Government and the Trucial chiefs, and the former appears to assume the moral obligation to protect the sheikhs in so far as they may be endangered or disabled from defending themselves. It should be noted that, under the treaty of 1853, the trucial obligations of the sheikhs only extend to their maritime activities and not to the interior of their domains.

There is some disagreement amongst geographers as to the definition of the term 'Oman', which in some maps is made to cover the whole of the promontory as far east as Muscat. In practice, the Trucial Oman coast is that territory which lies to the west and south of the Western Hajar mountains, including the Shamailiyah range, and extends almost to Qatar and the Ar Rimal section of the Rub-al-Khali desert. East of the Hajar mountains, on the Gulf of Oman, the country is known as Oman, and is under the rule of the Sultan of Muscat, although sometimes the term Oman is applied to the whole of this promontory.

Upon the coast, Trucial Oman extends in the Gulf of Oman from Khor Kalba to Dubai, and in the Persian Gulf from Sha'am to Khor-al-Odaid. Inland its frontiers are more difficult to define, but they cover a considerable portion of the interior of the Oman

treaty was signed in the Sheikh of Sharjah's palace in the presence of the Political Officer, who thenceforward took up his official residence at Sharjah.

To understand the intrigues and quarrels which were part of the normal relationship between the Oman sheikhs, one has to glance back to the middle of the last century, when the sheikhdoms of Sharjah and Dubai came into prominence. The internal history of Trucial Oman at this time, relating chiefly to petty wars among the principalities, is confusing and monotonous, but it is not altogether without meaning or explanation. The central fact is a contest for the paramountcy between the sheikhs of Sharjah and Dubai; a contest in which, after the first, the power of Sharjah (which at one time owned most of the Trucial Oman peninsula), appeared to decline, and one by which the Sheikh of Dubai, who held the balance of power, profited so largely and so unscrupulously that the principals from time to time forgot their feud in an endeavour to exterminate him by united action.

Besides hostilities traceable to the antagonism between Sharjah and Dubai, there was, however, much desultory fighting due to predatory raids and the reprisals which they provoked, and some incidents of considerable importance arose out of aggressions by the Sheikh of Sharjah on his smaller neighbours. About 1840 it was clearly the ambition of the Sheikh of Sharjah to reduce Umm-al-Qaiwain, 'Ajman, and even Dubai itself to dependence upon himself.

In May, 1838, Sheikh Khalifa, of Abu Dhabi, in whose mind the succession of the Al Bu Falaah to Dubai still rankled deeply, made a sudden raid upon that place in the absence of the inhabitants at the pearl banks. He captured a tower upon the sea face and, after placing a garrison of his own in it, withdrew. On receiving news of the incident, the Al Bu Falaah at once returned from the pearl fishery and, assisted by Sheikh Sultan-bin-Saqr the First of Sharjah, dislodged the intruding Bani Yas after three days' operations; they also destroyed the tower. Bickering followed, but in the end a settlement was reached, and the boats of Dubai and Abu Dhabi were enabled to return to the pearl banks before the close of the season.

In 1839 a blood-feud arose between the people of Dubai and those of Umm-al-Qaiwain, in which the Sheikh of Sharjah interposed. A year later the hand of Maktum-bin-Buti, Sheikh of Dubai, was shown in the domestic affairs of the Qasimi principality

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

• 175 by Sheikh Saqr-bin-Sultan's proclaiming his independence in the town of his father, Sultan-bin-Saqr, the Qasimi sheikh. On the failure of this *coup d'etat*, during the continuance of which the influence of Sheikh Maktum had dominated Sharjah, the rebellious son was provided at Dubai with a refuge from his father's vengeance.

Seemingly stung to fury by these proceedings, Sheikh Sultan-bin-Saqr underwent a reconciliation with his arch-enemy, Sheikh Khalifa of Abu Dhabi, and it was agreed between them that, on the capture of Dubai, the town should be completely destroyed and the inhabitants obliged to remove to Abu Dhabi or Sharjah. The Sheikh of Umm-al-Qaiwain also, having been placated by the Sheikh of Sharjah, was persuaded to join in the arrangement. When matters had reached this point, the Sheikh of Sharjah, with a falseness almost incredible even in one so celebrated for that quality, suddenly accepted the submission of the Sheikh of Dubai, which was accompanied by a gift of £250, and withdrew, leaving his indignant allies to conclude the affair as best they could.

In 1841 Dubai was much weakened by the exodus of 500 discontented Al Bu Mahair, who settled at Sharjah, and at the same time the prevalence of a virulent fever in Dubai Town caused a number of the inhabitants to desert it and settle temporarily, with the written permission of Sheikh Sultan, at the place called Dairah, which, in 1824–7, had been the cause of a serious dispute between the Sheikhs of Sharjah and Abu Dhabi. Finding Dubai almost undefended in consequence of these events, and the departure of the men of the Al Bu Falaah to the pearl fishery, the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, after securing the neutrality of the Beni Qitab and other Bedouin tribes, made a dash with 150 men upon the town, which he took and plundered, ravaging the date groves, destroying all provisions found, and burning a *batil*, the property of Sheikh Maktum of Dubai, on board of which some men were killed.

The Sheikh of Dubai enlisted the aid of his enemy, the Sheikh of Sharjah, but they collected only 200 men and feared to attack the invader, who held Jumairah, and the enterprising Khalifa-bin-Shakhbut sent out a raiding party to loot the village of Khan (a small dependence of Sharjah) in the rear, carrying off fifteen slaves.

After further petty wars, a peace was made in July, but a month later Khalifa, instigated by Sheikh Maktum, ravaged the territories of the Beni Qitab, Ghafalah and Na'im tribes, and carried off

a number of the camels which had been collected for safety at Dhaid while their owners were absent on a foray in the Batinah district.

In November, 1843, in consequence of an attack by Ghafalah on a Dubai caravan, Sheikh Maktum carried fire and sword into the country of that tribe and of the Na'im, who were allies of Sheikh Sultan-bin-Saqr, which led to a rupture between the two sheikhs. An inhabitant of Sharjah having been killed by the hand of a brother of Sheikh Maktum, a crisis again occurred, and again passed over harmlessly. Finally, a direct collision took place in the interior between the Ghafalah and the Sheikh of Dubai and several men were killed on either side. The Sheikh was victorious but lost the sight of one eye.

Petty tribal wars continued throughout the century. They were never on a large scale or serious enough to interfere with British interests in the Gulf, because the sheikhs were so jealous of one another that to combine was out of the question. The political game was played at its wiliest, and the practice of a sheikh was to play one ally off on another. If they had only acquired sufficient wisdom to settle their disputes amicably, co-operate on such matters as land reform, agriculture and water supply, the Oman Coast to-day might be a flourishing centre of Arab life. Instead of this, the major part of it is uncultivated desert, because the people have no incentive to irrigate the land and plant cereals and vegetables; that this can be done with considerable success is evidenced by the flourishing gardens at Sheikh's Wells and at Ras-al-Khaimah.

It has never been the policy of the sheikhs to better the lot of their subjects, however; as long as the people are unemployed for half the year, they can be relied upon to work hard at the pearl banks during the pearling season, and thus make enough money to carry them on for several months without working. It is a pernicious system, but the pearling-fleet owners argue that if the people were regularly employed on other occupations, such as agriculture or sheep rearing, they would have no desire to go to the pearl banks and the industry would languish for want of labour.

Another reason for the gradual cessation of tribal wars was the pearling industry, which is the most important feature of Arab life in the Gulf, and which necessitates the absence of a large proportion of the male inhabitants at the pearl fisheries during the two seasons of the year—April to June, and July to October. Since from

113

CHAPTER XI

GENERALLY speaking, the Arab tribes of the Trucial Oman Coast are peace-loving people who are content to cultivate their date plantations, rear their herds of camels and goats, or spend two seasons of the year at the profitable pearl-fisheries. Tribal wars have become less frequent, and raids on villages are nearly always confined to the Bedouin and other nomadic tribes. Meeting an Arab in Sharjah or Dubai at the present day, it is hard to realize that his great-grandfather was in all probability a savage, ruthless pirate who plundered ships and murdered their crews without mercy. The ancestor of the present sheikh, and the forebears of most of his nobles were men of this calibre.

Piracy in the Persian Gulf has as ancient a history as pearl fishing and, like pearling, most of the able-bodied men of the coastal towns and villages were engaged in it. It was a safe and easy game in the days of the old sailing ships, when contrary winds would lure unsuspecting mariners to an uncharted reef, on which, perhaps, a light was showing. The Arab pirates, like the Cornishmen of old, were skilful wreckers. As soon as the ship grounded, scores of *bagrahs*, or rowing-boats, would set out from the shore, and from these the pirates would leap aboard; armed to the teeth and bent on murder, they rarely took prisoners, and would burn the ship before they left, thereby destroying evidence for a prowling frigate to discover. Yet, as one finds from a study of the interesting official documents on piracy which, still unpublished, lie in the archives of the Indian Government, fortune did not always favour the pirates.

It must be said in defence of the Trucial Coast tribes, that they are by nature peace-loving and friendly, and although among the seafaring classes piracy was a fairly common pastime for centuries (as it was amongst the English, French and Americans), it did not extend to the fishermen, pearl divers and townsmen until the end of the eighteenth century. The adoption of piracy by the latter classes was almost entirely due to the pressure and influence of the Wahabis, the fanatical sect which at that time over-ran Oman and

175 721 did all in its power to incite the tribes against foreign enterprise in the Gulf. This policy was not agreeable to all the tribes, many of which found trading with the infidel to be profitable; but others were easy tools in the hands of the Wahabis, notably the Quasimi tribe, which was invariably eager for plunder of any sort.

The establishment of the Wahabis at Baraimi was followed by an increase of piracy and lawlessness at sea, which in India was ascribed chiefly to their influence. However, the Government of Bombay showed a degree of forbearance towards the pirates which it is difficult to understand. It appears to have been a standing order of the Government that none of their vessels in the Gulf should fire until they had been fired upon—a rule which placed their small and isolated cruisers at a dangerous disadvantage in dealing with an enemy whose favourite method of attack was by boarding; and offenders against this regulation were liable to heavy punishment. On one occasion Lieut. Gowan, of the *Fury*, 6 guns, having beaten off a number of boats which closed in upon him with hostile intent during a calm, received on arrival at Bombay a severe reprimand from the Governor in person 'for daring to molest the innocent and unoffending Arabs of these seas'.

To give one example of the methods of the pirates, I will quote the following incident, extracted from official documents:

On 21st October, 1808, the H.E.I. Company's cruiser *Sylph* of only 78 tons, mounting 8 guns, was approached by a fleet of large Arab vessels. She had been accidentally separated from the squadron which carried Sir Harford Jones and the members of his Mission to Persia, and Muhammad Hussain Khan, one of the Persian secretaries attached to this Mission, was actually on board the ship at the time. Precluded by regulations from using her guns until it was too late, the tiny vessel fell an easy prey to the crowd of boarders which the Arab ships hurled on her deck from their towering bows.

A wholesale massacre of her crews, who died fighting desperately, was the sequel. Among the few survivors of the action were the commander, Lieut. Graham, who fell, covered with wounds, down the fore hatchway, and the Persian secretary, who hid himself in a cabin locker. The lives of the remnant were saved by the sudden appearance on the scene of H.M.S. *Nereide*, Commodore Corbett, a frigate of 36 guns, at the sight of which the Quasimi took to flight in their own vessels, abandoning the *Sylph*,

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

and were pursued for some distance by the *Nereide*, but without success.

Piracy continued unabated until, in September, 1809, a naval and military expedition was sanctioned by the Governor-General of India (whose policy of appeasement had got him into trouble with the home government), the object of which was to destroy completely the sea power of the piratical tribes known under the general name of 'Quasimi', also to release British subjects and others held in bondage, and to obtain the return of several places on the Oman Coast to Sayid Sa'id, Sultan of Muscat, which had been taken from him by the Quasimi.

The expedition arrived at Muscat on 24th October, and was joined by gentlemen of Sir John Malcolm's Mission to Persia, who 'most handsomely volunteered their services'. After re-victualling, the expedition proceeded to Ras-al-Khaimah, which was reached on 11th November; but owing to the shallowness of the water it was obliged to anchor two to four miles from the town, according to their size. The action began when the British fleet fired on the *Minerva*, a captured vessel which the Arabs had mounted with twenty guns, and which was starting on a cruise. Heavy fire from the shore forts prevented her seizure, but she was burned. In the action the cruiser *Prince of Wales* went aground and was subjected to a fusillade from shore batteries.

On the 12th the town was heavily bombarded by the fleet, and on the 13th, under cover of a barrage, marines and sepoys were landed at the harbour mouth and waded ashore. After heavy hand-to-hand fighting the walls of the town were scaled and, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the centre of the town had been gained and the British flag been hoisted on the sheikh's palace. Thirty large war boats were set on fire, some booty obtained by individuals, but on the 14th, in consequence of a report that a large force of Wahabis was approaching from the interior, Colonel Smith, anxious to avoid further conflict with his small force, hurriedly re-embarked his troops.

During the entire action at Ras-al-Khaimah, two men were killed on board the *Prince of Wales*, and Captain Dansey of the 65th Regiment was slain by a spear which struck him in the neck while he was clearing a house in the town; the wounded numbered twenty-one. But for the screen formed by the smoke of burning houses the British losses would, it is said, have been much heavier.

175
721 Incidents like the above continued unabated throughout the century. In 1820 a general Treaty of Peace was signed, which included the submission of Sultan-bin-Saqr, Sheikh of Sharjah (who, on leaving the hospitality afforded him by the Sultan of Muscat, apparently took to piracy as a quick means of recovering his lost fortunes), and the Sheikhs of Dubai, Ras-al-Khaimah, Bahrain, and Abu Dhabi. Piracy abated somewhat in the next ten years, but in 1850 we hear of further attacks on British merchant ships, and depredations on shipping continued, in spite of severe reprisals and fines, until the end of the century.

It was the appearance of the steamship, with its greater speed, independence of winds, and heavier gun power, which really brought piracy to a close. The Arabs realized that it was suicide to attempt to pit their wooden ships and boats against modern sea power, and the few who stuck to piracy confined their attacks to smaller, unarmed sailing ships.

The establishment of order at sea was necessarily a gradual process, but by 1890 piracy had ceased to be a popular profession. There were sporadic outbreaks in the last few years of the century, and as late as 1905 a British merchant vessel was attacked. But the Wahabi influence had long been broken, the fight against iron-clad men-o'-war was unequal, and the old piratical tribes settled down once more to the safer occupation of fishing and pearl-diving.

Piracy is dead in the Persian Gulf, although isolated attacks on dhows still occur. As recently as 1944 a large Arab dhow, containing food supplies on its way to Dubai, was attacked by a native sailing ship and the crew murdered. The matter was immediately reported to the Political Officer, Captain Bird, who ascertained that the pirates came from a village on the Persian side of the Gulf, near Jask. Representations were made to the Iran Government, and it is believed that the culprits were apprehended and hanged, suitable compensation being paid to the dependents of the victims. To-day piracy is frowned upon by all sections of the community; even the sheikhs consider it is no longer respectable.

[433]
396
501 Fishing and pearling have replaced the more violent forms of sea traffic, and shipbuilding remains an important industry on the Trucial Coast. The war has held up supplies of timber and sail-cloth, which came from India, but several large boats have been built from stocks of old material. The largest dhows, which sometimes sail as far south as South Africa and can easily make the passage

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

crowding into the Commission's truck, we left it in the desert under guard.

After an hour's journey we reached the Commission's encampment and had a hot meal of curried hash, potatoes, sweet tea and fruit, and settled down for the night. Yarning over the fire before we turned in, Captain Tandy told me that his father, an Army officer in the service of the Indian Government, had been murdered in the Nejd in 1913, whilst attempting to settle a frontier dispute with a Turkish delegate; a scuffle had ensued, during which Major Tandy had received a fatal knife wound.

The Arabs are great tale-tellers and Sheikh Hamid, listening to this account, could not hold back his version of the Kalba succession. It was the story of his uncle, Sheikh Khali bin Ahmed, now a feeble old man of eighty, who seldom left his territory on the western side of the Shimailiyah mountains. Twenty years ago, when Sultan bin Saqr (father of the present ruler of Sharjah), died, Khali, who was a near relative, succeeded him. The young son of Sheikh Sultan grew up under Khali's protection on the death of his father, but in 1924, the young and ambitious prince, who was twenty-six, decided that the time had come for him to rule Sharjah without Khali's help. To assist him in his plans he enlisted the aid of the Sheikh of D[illegible] and drove Khali out, compensating him in characteristic Arab fashion by granting him a parcel of land at Djaidh, which he illegally claimed as a dependency.

Shortly afterwards the Sheikh of Kalba died, and there was a dispute between Sultan bin Saqr, who belonged to the same clan as Kalba, the Quasimi, and the Sheikh of Ras-al-Khaimah, over the ascendancy. The Sheikh of Ras-al-Khaimah belonged to a different tribe and had no prescriptive right to the sheikhdom, but he regarded Kalba as strategically part of his territory. The dispute was temporarily settled by the action of the British Government, which appointed Khali as Regent of Kalba until the sheikh's young son, Hamid bin Sayid, came of age. This seemed to be an ideal arrangement, since Khali was unmarried and had no descendants for whom he might entertain ambitions.

Unfortunately Khali was no sooner confirmed as Regent than he began to cast covetous eyes on the sheikhdom. Although he was sixty-four he soon found a bride and by her had four sons. Within two years the young Sheikh Hamid will be of age and, presumably, will ascend the throne; this will not be at all to Khali's liking, for his own sons are growing up and he would prefer to

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

622 see them rule Kalba. The situation is a delicate one, and although
175 young Hamid is under the protection of both the British Government and Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr, he is living under a shadow. The Government wished to send him away to school, but he recently ran away from an establishment at Bahrain and lives in the Sheikh's palace at Sharjah, in constant fear of being murdered. Should that fate befall him, it is likely that a war between Sharjah and Kalba would be precipitated, with Ras-al-Khaimah and Dubai participating.

This account of Kalba's succession I have related elsewhere, but I give it again because it differs in some respects from the official version. It is a situation which, unless handled with care, might easily be the cause of a long internecine war between the tribes.